

February 24, 2015

Greetings Representative Fleischmann, honorable members of the Committee on Education:

I am writing to support HB 6835: An Act Concerning English Language Learners in which Bilingual Education is to be extended to 60 months with a lower student threshold and flexibility in hiring educators.

Up to this year I have been a Bilingual Educator for eleven years in Windham; with one year in Waterbury. At the University of Connecticut's Neag School of Education I earned a Master's degree in Bilingual instruction and curriculum. This is the third year out of a classroom (I have been "repurposed" to provide "Bilingual support" to grades k, 1, 2 and 3: approximately 45 students in all). I am challenged by many conditions with this approach: keeping up with different grade level objectives and data teams; tracking student movement; proctoring the State mandated English language assessment for all 85 students in the building which has cost the children four weeks of "Bilingual support."

I applaud the Committee's effort in addressing a systemic approach that has perpetuated the underachievement of Connecticut's Emergent Bilingual students.

With the thirty month limit we have placed on Bilingual Education we have in effect created a system of underachievement that lends itself to a tracking of a population of over 25% of the student body identified as Emergent Bilingual. There has been a steady increase in this population for at least ten years.

The constraints of the established law are problematic because it has not kept up with the extensive research regarding native language literacy and second language acquisition. It has already been established that ESL (English as a Second Language) programming is inappropriate for early literacy of Emergent Bilingual students and immersion with the objective of facilitating critical thinking skills (recall the Unz Proposition 227 in California, 1998) simply doesn't work.

As we have compromised Bilingual Education in Windham by way of eliminating Transitional Bilingual programming and not opening up other avenues, such as dual language we have effectively marginalized children simply because of who they are. We need to recall that *a program that uses and develops the student's native language and culture to help the student acquire academic skills, positive self-concept skills and develop English proficiency. The model is based on research which asserts that to be successful in the English only classroom, Emergent Bilingual students must **continue** to develop cognitive and linguistic skills in their native language, while they are learning English. This approach will allow students to successfully transfer those abilities, skills and strategies to their new language. A student is fully transitioned into the English only program after he/she has reached a sufficient level of proficiency in all four domains of English to ensure equal access to the instruction in the English only classroom.* This is especially important given the role of Common Core Standards and the implications of higher order thinking and the emphasis on presentation and argument to demonstrate comprehension.

The sixty month Bilingual Education can trump all English reading interventions because it is through Bilingual Education that we can build upon an Emergent Bilingual student's native

language to facilitate higher order thinking more readily. Local boards of education are stymied by the thirty month limit on Bilingual Education. Exiting because of time and not readiness does not assure the ability to learn in English only. An early push with English phonics interventions will produce recalling parrots who happen to score well in on line assessments. The additional snag: when the students are denied native language literacy they will not have the foundation needed to transfer skills for English reading and writing. Supporting native language literacy for more than thirty months will produce the critical thinkers needed for the future of our state. The Emergent Bilingual student will experience success and thrive. I believe an increase in time for quality Bilingual Education would reduce the representation of Emergent Bilingual students in Special Education and intervention case loads. Through time and review of data in my own district I am able to identify the stronger student based on their home language literacy ability and their ability to take on new English content is dependent on their home language foundation. I provide the analogy of a rubber band. The first stretch should be in the home language so that second language comprehension follows. In reverse, we witness a break down in learning and increase in frustration to the point of stagnation. However, nothing can replace the joy of witnessing how a student feels when they demonstrate their genius in both their home language and academic English. This student is confident, knowledgeable and willing to take learning risks. This motivation is crucial for today's educational requirements.

Thank you. I remain
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